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Melissa Straus

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PS-MS-TR-STRAUS-103111

Melissa Straus

Interview with Vanessa

Knox County Humane Society

Co-Workers present: None

MS: Melissa Straus

V: Vanessa

MS: OK, we're recording. Alright, so, I'm here with Vanessa at the Knox County Humane Society and it's October 31, 2011. And the purpose of this interview is to learn more about public areas of interest in Knox County. Okay, so if you want you can just hold that (handing her the recording device)

V: Okay

MS: Alright, so, um, how long have you been living in Mt. Vernon for?

V: In Mt. Vernon? I've been here for about four years.

MS: Okay, and where did you move from again?

V: Fredericktown.

MS: Fredericktown.

V: And I was there for about seven years.

MS: Okay, so you said you moved here to live with your dad?

V: And my step mom.

MS: And your step mom. What do they do here?

V: My dad is a semi-driver and my step mom is a substitute teacher for the local schools.

MS: Oh, okay. Oh, so, um, what school do you go to?

V: The Knox County Career Center.

MS: The Knox County Career Center.

V: Mhmm

MS: Alright, um, and do they have the grade levels or is it...

V: They start at sophomore-

MS: Sophomore.

V: -and then they go through to your senior year.

MS: Okay, so have you always gone to this school or did you have to go to...

V: I've always gone through it, like when I signed up for the career center they originally started with a freshmen program, and that's what I got in as.

MS: Oh, okay. Um, so how would you say you spend your normal weekday?

V: A normal weekday...

MS: Mhmm.

V: I normally go to school 'til about 11:40, then I sign out and then I go to the Knox County Humane Society. And I'll be there for about two hours and then I'll... like, it depends on if they're actually open or not, like if it's a scheduled open day, I'll be there 'til 7:00 that night, maybe. If it's just a, like, Tuesday or Wednesday, when they're closed, I might come for only an hour, two hours.

MS: Okay.

V: And then I'd go home and ... sleep? (Laughs) It varies from day-to-day. Like sometimes I take the dog up to the dog park.

MS: Okay, so the dog park that's by like...

V: The movie theater?

MS: Yeah.

V: Yeah, Wolf Run.

MS: Um, so, would you say the places you visit on a day-to-day basis would be like the Humane Society, school, ... are there any other places that . . .

V: The public library, I do a lot of studying and reading there.

MS: Okay, um, so when you're not studying or volunteering—

V: Mhmm

MS: —where else do you like to spend your time?

V: The parks in Fredericktown. I like to just hang out with friends there, shoot some hoops, you know, things like that.

MS: Oh, okay. Um, so where did you meet most of your friends here?

V: Probably my school. Like, my school has an ambassador program so I'm an ambassador and I go to other schools to recruit and I also make a lot of friendships that way.

MS: Okay, so like, which schools do you go to around here?

V: Fredericktown, Mt. Vernon, East Knox, Danville, Centerburg.

MS: Okay, and, so you said you hang out with your friends like at parks... are there any other places you guys go to?

V: Sometimes the movies, I mean, it kind of depends on the weather. Sometimes we just head back to somebody's house and we just have guitar hero wars (laughs)

MS: (laughs) Sounds fun. Um, so, like since you were new like four years ago, how, like, are there any places in Knox County or Mt. Vernon that you think are welcoming for, like, new comers?

V: The library is really welcoming. Uh... pretty much anywhere that you can volunteer your time, like Goodwill, the Humane Society, the Dog Pound. Those are pretty welcoming because it gets you to know people and it gets you to have some sort of reference. 'Cause like, since I've been volunteering here so long I could very easily use Heidi or Tina as a reference.

MS: Yeah, and what would you, like, use them to refer you to? Or...

V: For like, a job reference.

MS: Yeah. Okay, um, so, let's see, so how many hours a week did you say you spend at the Humane Society?

V: It varies from 15-20, I mean it just kind of depends how long I stay during the night.

MS: Yeah

V: 'Cause on surgery days I can leave here at 4 or I could leave here at 7 or I could stay 'til 9 and work with the dogs some more. You know, it just kinda depends on really how long I want to stay.

MS: Ok, and how, like, who are the other regular volunteers?

V: There's a girl who comes on Saturday, she's 11. Her name's Ana, she's really cool.

MS: Okay.

V: I mean, she's like really mature for her age, which was really surprising. And, we have a lot of community service people come through. Some of them are repeat offenders so you kind of get to know names. And...

MS: Yeah. Okay, so do you, like, would you consider the Humane Society somewhere where people are just welcome to come in...

V: Oh yeah.

MS: ...and help out.

V: Yeah, it's very welcoming, I mean, they're really friendly here and...

MS: (faintly) Do you think?

V: ...could use the help.

MS: Sorry!

V: (laughs) It's okay.

MS: Do you think that it's publicized around the community pretty well?

V: I mean, it's pretty good since it's a non-profit organization—it could be so much better if they had the funds.

MS: Like, how do you think it could be more welcoming or more advertised?

V: I think there could be (faint dogs barking in background) radio ads, for like, our events that we have, for like Bingo night, which is a fundraising night. We have straw and hay giveaways for when the weather gets cold for the outside animals. And we have all kinds of things that could be advertised through the newspaper, or through even the television, things like that on, like, the local channels, or the radio stations around here.

MS: So, do a lot of people use the radio as, like, a way to find out events in the community?

V: I think so.

MS: So, do you listen to the radio a lot?

V: Oh, I love music. (laughs)

MS: Is there like a local radio station which you have in mind? Or...

V: Like I think, The Eagle and The Blitz are really popular around here.

MS: Okay. Um, so for more about the Humane Society...

V: Okay.

MS: Um, what, so, how and when did you come across the Humane Society?

V: (takes a deep breath) I would say February of last year is when I started volunteering. (Faint dog whimper in the background) And I was recommended to start volunteering for college scholarships.

MS: Okay.

V: And my counselor told me since I like animals I should definitely come down here and check it out. Well, I went to the wrong place - I went to the dog pound instead. And they require you to be 18 or have your parent with you at all times. And my step-mom really wasn't too keen on the idea and my dad's out of town all the time. So, they told me to come up to the cat shelter and I came up and they were like "Yeah, as long as your parent signs the papers saying that it's all cool (laughs) you can come in whatever you want." And I've kind of been here ever since.

MS: Okay, so would you so, because of like, the whole minor-and-having-your-guardian do you think that the Humane Society is better for all ages? Or...

V: Oh yeah.

MS: Okay.

V: Because there's a spot on the volunteer form...

MS: Mhmm.

V: ...where your parent can sign but your parent doesn't have to show up and be with you to make sure that you're not getting bit or something.

MS: Mhmm.

V: I mean, they're animals, they're unpredictable. As long as you're comfortable around them, I think it's perfectly fine to be here.

MS: Okay. Um, so you said that you had other people in the community that come by and volunteer. Do people tend to come back when they volunteer once? Or is it...

V: I think so. I mean, it's a fair mix. Like, I've had a couple of friend that have come once or twice and they just haven't come again because they haven't had the time.

MS: Mhmm.

V: And I've got a friend who keeps trying to make efforts to come with me, but she always "accidentally" shows up after they've already closed the doors. (Laughs). And, it's just... after you've been established here you can pretty much come and go as they're (pointing toward the front desk) here.

MS: Okay, so, why, I mean, what reasons do you think people have to keep coming back?

V: There is a good feeling. Because, you know, you can't take all of them home; you can't save 'em all. But if you get to see them be adopted and you get to see them... rub around your legs or something... like in reference to the cats, it's really cool to feel like you're making an impact.

MS: Mhmm.

V: And it's a good feeling.

MS: Yeah, I agree. Um, so, do you think there is a time of the year when the Humane Society is more lively?

V: During kitten season, which is like Spring and Fall.

MS: Okay.

V: 'Cause that's when most cats go through their heat cycle and give birth to litters. We are *so* packed with kittens during those times. (Laughs)

MS: Yeah.

V: I mean, it's not too bad right now and... we still are getting out a lot of adoptions. I think yesterday we had 5 cats be adopted, which is really cool.

MS: At the same time?

V: Well, at different times.

MS: Oh.

V: I mean, it was all throughout the day, but it was really cool to have that number adopted.

MS: Yeah. Um, do you think—do you see more volunteers coming in at the time when the shelter is more crowded?

V: Actually, we see a decline in volunteers?

MS: Why do you think that is?

V: I really don't know why, it's just—I think we just have more volunteers when we really don't need them. It just seems like whenever we need the help, nobody's there.

MS: Okay. So, would the spring and fall be the times when you need the most help, or...

V: In my opinion, yes.

MS: And... so when do you get the most volunteers?

V: I'd say during the school year, because families aren't on vacations and things like that.

MS: Okay. Um, and what do most volunteers do when they come here?

V: Pet animals. (Laughs)

MS: (Laughs)

V: Like, they pet the cats, they get the dogs out for walks—those are the typical things. There are a couple volunteers that have the stomach to clean cages, clean kennels, and things like that. And on surgery days, which are Mondays and Thursdays, we have our low-cost spay and neuter clinic, and we have a bunch of volunteers that come in pretty much to shave cats because it's really cool. (Laughs) I sound really excited about it. I don't—I actually am, 'cause it's really fun.

MS: Well it sounds fun. (Laughs)

V: I mean, it sounds weird, but it sounds really fun. And, we have a couple that will come in strictly on surgery days to help out the surgeries.

MS: Okay. Um, do you think that the Humane Society has changed at all since you've been here? You've been here for, like, about a year?

V: Mhmm.

MS: Has it changed in any way?

V: Oh yeah. There is a lot more organization, 'cause the more help you have, the more the paid employees can take to organize things and figure out the new systems that the board members have handed down and... it's... cleaner and friendlier. Which is really cool 'cause it makes for happier, healthier animals.

MS: Yeah. Okay, um, so I think I've got a lot about the Humane Society, but I just want to ask you more about, like, what *you* do as a highschooler...

V: Okay.

MS: I mean, do you consider yourself a highschooler?

V: (Laughs) Kind of, I mean I'm only there for two hours and then I leave so...

MS: Okay. And did you—so you said you made a lot of friends from school.

V: Mhmm.

MS: Are they mainly, like, your age?

V: Well, when I was a freshman, I kind of hung around a group of seniors, and when they all graduated I felt really alone so then I realized that I needed to widen my span and have a group of all ages, and so now I kind of hang out with the sophomores, I hang out with some of the juniors, I hang out with a lot of seniors 'cause I'm graduating this year and...

MS: Yeah. So, has your dad and step-mom always lived in Mt. Vernon?

V: My step-mom has. When my dad was younger, like when I was first around, he lived in Mansfield with my mom, and then when they divorced he lived with my grandparents in Ashland, and he's been all over the place because he's a semi driver. Like, he's been out to California, he's been out to New York... he's, he's seen it all, (laughs) in my opinion.

MS: Okay, so do you think that the move—if you weren't in high school, would it be harder to make friends in Mt. Vernon?

V: I don't think so.

MS: Really?

V: Because I think that a lot of the people—it's like a shiny new toy. If there's somebody new, you *gotta* play with it. (Laughs)

MS: Yeah.

V: It's... you gotta at least ask the basic questions; Who are you? Where are you from? How old are you? (Laughs)

MS: Yeah.

V: And I think a lot of people are really friendly. Like, before I started school, 'cause I moved in with my step-mom shortly after I had finished a school year, so, like, June-ish, I started hanging out with the neighbor kids. And, it was just friendships, like that fast because it was... the shiny new toy. (Laughs) And everybody had to know everything about me. And you know, I was a secretive little kid—I didn't want people to know me, because I didn't expect to stay this long.

MS: Yeah. Okay, so, like, even if you had just gone to the like the library, or, I don't know...

V: Or even like the public pool.

MS: Do you think that people would just come up and start talking to you?

V: I think so.

MS: Okay. That's really interesting—I've moved around a lot and never really had that experience with people wanting to get to know me, (laughs) so. Um, do you think that—so I'm assuming that most people in Mt. Vernon have lived here their whole lives?

V: I'd say they are a tight-knit group.

MS: Okay.

V: But I mean, once you break that first few steps it's—you're accepted as if you've been here your whole life, too.

MS: Okay. And, are there any, like, community events that, like, you'll get invited to and—that are annual...

V: Mhmm

MS: ...where you can come like, gather, with everyone and just like, feel really a part of the community?

V: Mhmm. There's something called first Friday I believe. It's like the first Friday of every month they close off the square and they have, like, carnival games and occasionally there's a car show, or something like that, and that's pretty cool to get involved with.

MS: Okay, and um...

V: You can meet *a lot* of people out there. (Laughs)

MS: How—How would you say is the best way to meet someone?

V: You gotta have confidence. Because you gotta... (laughs)

MS: (Laughs)

V: ...Because if you walk up and just say something totally random, like left field, like, if you walk up and there's somebody just standing there and you're like, "Yeah, the sky looks a little bit purple today"... (laughs)

MS: (Laughs)

V: ...You can start a conversation, and as long as they have a good sense of humor you're perfectly fine—you've got a new friend.

MS: Okay, um, so, you said that you go to the movie theater or...

V: Mhmm

MS: ...depending on the weather, um, so, when it gets like really dreary out and really snowy...

V: (Laughs)

MS: ...like it will be very soon...

V: (Laughs) Yeah, it's Ohio. (Laughs)

MS: Do you mainly—is there somewhere that you spend most of your time with your friends?

V: Uh, we go sledding a lot. We go up snow trails or something like that, and we'll go tubing. Yeah, I've never been skiing, but—they've tried to get me on skis so many times but I'm just like "No, I'm just going to go over to the tubes" (Laughs).

MS: (Laughs) Where do you do that?

V: It's up in Bellville. It's a ski lodge called 'Snow Trails' and they've got tubing, snowboarding, skiing, obviously. And, they've got really cool indoor areas to hang out and like, sip hot chocolate or something.

MS: Okay, um, do you think there are any—like, when I talk to you about like, 'hanging out', are there any places that would come to your mind, that you would think of as, like, really social places that I'm missing?

V: Um... not really, I mean, you could always go to the Y.

MS: Okay.

V: 'Cause even though there's a lot of gyms and swimming pools and things in there, it's still cool to meet people that have the same interests. Like, if you like to swim you can just strictly go to the pool for a couple of days, see whose a regular, you know.

MS: Okay, and what does, like, what does the Y look like, or what's inside it?

V: Well, I haven't looked in the gym because I'm a pool person. (Laughs) But, like, the pool—they've got a lap pool, and it's nice sized, and if you go on certain days you don't have to do laps, you can just kind of hang out in one corner and just kind of tread water, dip your toes, whatever you want. It's all indoors so it's nice and warm.

MS: Okay, and are there like, areas where you can just hang out with people, like couches, or...

V: Yeah, there is a lounge at the Y.

MS: Okay, and do you have to be a member to go?

V: Mm mm, But it does cost, like, I don't know what the prices are, I think the lounge is kind of just open, but like, the pool is five dollars a day, and I'm not sure what the gym prices are.

MS: Okay, and can you pay for a membership? Or...

V: Mhmm, yeah, you can get a membership. I don't know those costs either, though.

MS: Oh, that's fine.

V: (Laughs)

MS: And do members ever bring guests, just like, to treat them?

V: Sometimes, yeah.

MS: Okay. So, why—Oh! What about, do people, like high-schoolers, ever go to like, the roller rink around here? Or...

V: (Laughs) Now *I* do. I mean—but I don't really see much of the high-schoolers around, I see more so the younger generation, like the middle-schoolers.

MS: Okay. Do you think that, it's a bit—like do you think that like, having Facebook, and like, all these websites and everything ever influences how much you hang out with your friends outside?

V: I think it does, I mean, I think it also influences who your friends are. Because, I've heard so many people come up to me—well, like on Myspace you can set who your top friends are—I've heard so many people throw fits about not being on so and so's list, and so it's like, it's... a website.

MS: Yeah.

V: I mean, whatever.

MS: Do you ever see how like, um, anything that happens online would influence your—other than like the top friends—would it ever influence the dynamic, like, the personal dynamic. Like, do you think that people...

V: Like, I know this girl—I think I know what you're talking about...

MS: Okay.

V: I know this girl, and she's the shyest little thing. But, when it comes to Facebook, she posts absolutely *everything* she does. Like, she Twitter-feeds her Facebook. And, I mean, it's—a lot of times you sit back and go like, "That's a little too much information to be on the internet where *everyone* can see it."

MS: Yeah, um...

V: And I think a lot of people get the wrong labels because of what they post. Like, my little sister, she'll post a very explicit video, but it's too a popular song she likes, but she'll get labeled something the next day at school. And so, I think it does hurt a lot of people.

MS: Yeah. Um, do you ever wish there was, like, more of a personal, like, face-to-face interaction than online, or do you think that the balance is really good?

V: I think that there needs to be more face-to-face, because I mean, even with texting you don't hear each others voice's much.

MS: Yeah. So, do you also—Are there places in the community where you see like, older generations get together more than younger generations?

V: Yeah, like the—the golf fields. I'll see a lot of older guys hanging out there, but, there wives would be at like, the quilting thing down at the health department, or something like that.

MS: Okay, and, why would you think, like, the disparity, or like, the difference?

V: (Laughs) Well, everybody's gotta have their time with the same gender.

MS: Mhmm. Yeah.

V: But I mean, (laughs) I think the older generations are into the calmer, more quiet things, and the younger generations are into the loud, in-your-face type of things, like the toilet-papering and vandalizing of that nature. (Laughs) Or the, going up to the movies and causing mayhem by screaming "fire," you know, that type of thing, you know?

MS: Yeah.

V: I mean, not that I have known anybody that's done that, but I think we're into that more adrenaline-junky type style stuff.

MS: Yeah, like pranks and things like that.

V: Oh yeah.

MS: Um, so, if there's like—are there any, like, parties or anything that you think the whole—like, you're age group, like everyone—it would just be open to everyone? Or...

V: Yeah, I think a lot of people do have house parties that, pretty much the doors constantly will open because anybody can come in, because there's a lot of trust in the community.

MS: Okay. Um, could you, like, describe what a party is like? And (Vanessa laughs) you can't get in any trouble because it's just—it's just about public spaces, we're not... I don't even know your last name, so...

V: (Laughs) Well, okay. Well... it's on that paper over there (points to the waver and laughs).

MS: Okay, well... (laughs) we all do the same things, so... (Vanessa and Melissa laugh)

V: I mean, there are a lot of drunken parties, there are a lot of parties where drugs are involved... I mean, I'm more of the drunken scene-type party. And a lot of my friends are, because we don't necessarily want to screw ourselves over by going to the drugs one and then having a random drug test the next day at work or something.

MS: Yeah.

V: 'Cause that's never are good idea (laughs). Um, some parties are kind of just like a rave, which is just loud music, lots of lights, and tons of dancing.

MS: Mhmm.

V: And there's absolutely nothing illegal involved in it, and those ones are cool, too, because it's really trippy on the eyes. (Laughs)

MS: Yeah, and are—are parents ever there for—like, if you said there's a rave and there's no drinking or no drugs?

V: I don't think parents would go, I mean, parents are more so, the drunken party, but they don't want the kids around.

MS: Mhmm.

V: Like, unless it's my mom—my mom's really cool, she's the one who picked me up this past weekend, that way I wasn't driving home... (laughs).

MS: Yeah.

V: And she's cool with everything, because she's at the stage where she thinks we're mature enough to make our own decisions. Like after we hit 18, she's—"If you need anything, call me, but I trust your decisions."

MS: Yeah. So, do you think that, like, do you think that most parents have the view so that kids wouldn't feel too, like—if you want to go to a party where all of your friends are—do you think that's like, do people in the community acknowledge that that's what, like, at our age, that's what you want to do? Or...

V: I think people in the community acknowledge it, but I don't think they approve of it.

MS: Okay.

V: I mean, I think it's one of those turn the other cheek as long as nothing happens.

MS: Okay. And, so do you think that like, if there were, like a high school student who didn't drink or do drugs, would they still feel welcome to go to these parties?

V: I think more so they'd be welcome to go to the rave-style parties.

MS: Okay.

V: I don't think they'd feel as comfortable at the ones where those things are going on.

MS: Okay. So, all these parties would be just like, house parties?

V: Mhmm. Like, somebody picks a house, cleans up all of the valuables, locks them in a room, and opens the door with signs going towards the bathroom. (Laughs)

MS: Okay, and do, like, parents have to be out of town for this?

V: Normally, yeah. (Laughs)

MS: Okay.

V: I mean, that's normally how it goes down but occasionally a parent will say, "Yeah, sure, I'll just be in my bedroom." And then, if the police show up, (laughs) the parents are like, jumpin' out the window—you know, normally the kids are the one running—nah, the parents are jumping out. (Laughs)

MS: (Laughs) Okay. Do you want—do the police ever, like, actually get anyone in trouble? Or...

V: In town—in town they're more willing to get people in trouble. But if you're out of town—like out of city limits, I think they're okay with it.

MS: Okay, so where is outside of city limits?

V: (Deep exhale) Like, okay. Do you know anything about Fredericktown?

MS: Um... kind of? (Laughs)

V: Okay, well there's a little... village/community, whatever you want to call it, outside of Fredericktown called Ankenytown, and that's kind of "out of town" for Fredericktown. So, there could be a couple parties up there, or, like if you're in town, you've just got to be friends with the cops to get them to turn the other cheek, but you've got to make sure they're the ones on shift, because if you go and have a party and it's not the ones on shift, you're kind of screwed.

MS: Okay.

V: Yeah.

MS: So, would you say that like, um, like, the people who go to the parties come from—they're not just from Mt. Vernon, they're from like surrounding townships as well?

V: Mhmm.

MS: Okay.

V: Like, because of the Career Center—the Career Center works as a feeder school, like we're fed off of the other schools in the county—because they work that way, there's a lot of friends that'll go across the county to go to a really cool party.

MS: Mhmm.

V: Like, the one I went to over the weekend was all the way in Clear Fork, which is Bellville area; Bellville/Butler, yeah.

MS: So, is it like, um, do you ever have, I mean like, friends-of-friends parties that you'll go to because you heard about it through...

V: I try to avoid those ones, because you can never really figure out the crowd that's going to be there. I mean, I try to stick to the ones that are just, "Hey, you're buddy so and so is having a bash this weekend, you want to go down?" "Yeah, sure, why not?" 'Cause his crowd is normally the rednecks I hang out with are his crowds (Vanessa and Melissa laugh). The wannabe-gangsters that I hang out with are his crowds, the preps I hang out with... so yeah, that'd be alright.

MS: Yeah. Um, and how many people do you think, on average, would be at...

V: A party? Oh... (exhales) lowers of ten all the way to... high thirty?

MS: Okay.

V: So like, ten to thirty-ish.

MS: So like a full house party.

V: Yeah. (Laughs) I mean, it just kind of depends on how big your network is and what you say is going to be there.

MS: Okay. So, from what I understand it's like open-door policy, pretty much...

V: Pretty much, as long as, like, let's say your host is Kristin and Kristin doesn't get along with Jack, Danielle, or Michaela. Those three better not show up—if you show up with them, you're going to be asked to leave.

MS: Okay. Alright, well I think got everything down. I mean, (Vanessa laughs) it's similar to...

V: It's similar to a party anywhere.

MS: Yeah (Vanessa laughs). Okay, um, so, do you have anything else that you want to say, like about the Humane Society, or, I mean, about (Vanessa and Melissa laugh) how people can come as a public space?

V: Um, it's definitely a public space to come in and it's cool the bring friends to come in and walk dogs because there's a lot of dogs who will enjoy being walked in the company of another dog.

MS: Mhmm.

V: So, like, the play-buddies are cool to get out together and, you know, it's cool to let the dogs have some time out or let the cats that are a little bit more shy have some one-on-one with a human.

MS: Yeah. Do you guys ever bring the animals out to the community to try to attract more people in?

V: We work closely with We Luv Pets, like a lot of the cats you see at We Luv Pets that are for adoption actually come from us.

MS: Okay.

V: And, whenever we have a community booth, we try to take a couple of the more well-behaved dogs and maybe a cat or two, and we will have adoptions on the spot if you pass our tests.

MS: Okay, and what are the tests like?

V: There's an application process that needs to be reviewed and call a reference or two, and...

MS: Okay.

V: Yeah.

MS: From what I understand it seems like anyone really can volunteer.

V: Yeah, absolutely, anyone can volunteer, and as long as you don't cause problems you're welcome back.

MS: Okay. Alright, well, I think that's everything I need. Thank you so much.